

**ADDRESS BY MR TAN KOK YAM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SKILLSFUTURE SINGAPORE & CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE FOR ADULT LEARNING COUNCIL AT THE IAL GRADUATION CEREMONY 2023, 27 OCTOBER 2023, 3.00PM, SCHOOL OF THE ARTS**

Associate Professor Yeo Li Pheow, Executive Director, Institute for Adult Learning

Graduands

Ladies & Gentlemen

1. Good afternoon. I am honoured to be here today. My heartiest congratulations to all the graduands of the WSQ Diploma in Design and Development for Learning and Performance; and the Master of Learning and Professional Development.
2. I wonder if many of you have heard about this individual, called Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, who passed away recently. In the 70s, he designed a cheap self-flushing toilet for mass use in India, and dedicated his life to the promotion of safe, hygienic sanitation for his country. For his tremendous contributions, his countrymen affectionately call him the “toilet man of India”.
3. Indulge me a little more, and let me highlight what else happened. Dr Pathak’s flush toilets did away with the need for manual jobs to clear human excrement – the Indian version of “nightsoil workers”, from the lowest caste, shunned for what they did, even if their work had been necessary. These workers now could do other work, and Dr Pathak pushed for their re-education, so that they take on more dignified jobs – seamstress, candle-maker, and so on.
4. I am not making a pitch for sanitation technology. I don’t believe SUSS or any of our universities offer that particular degree. I do hope to highlight, with this example, that technology advancement does not just improve the lot of the user – it can also uplift and elevate the status of the worker. But this is only when the worker is empowered and enabled with continual education, with upskilling. This is your role as adult educators in our society – to empower the rest of us. Dr Pathak, among the many things he did, was also an adult educator. He saw the need for adult education alongside technology innovation.
5. This principle for creating socio-economic impact, and this mission of adult education in worker empowerment, remains the same, whether we are talking about toilet flushing a long time ago, or artificial intelligence today. The only difference is the cadence, the speed, at which applicable technological innovations are affecting our lives. The pressure on our lifelong learning system will be tremendous, and DPM Wong has already charged us with bringing the SkillsFuture movement to a higher gear. The pressure on you as adult educators will be tremendous, because your role is a pathfinder to others in a terrain that keeps shifting.
6. What should your response be as an adult educator? I think the answer is self-evident. Keep upskilling and investing in your own skillsets.

7. First, deepen the core or “tan jia” skills that define you as an educator. The fact that you are here today means that you need no convincing on this. “Tan jia” is hokkien for making a living, and as adult educators, you make a living from getting others to learn, giving them confidence, preparing them for new challenges.
8. A good part of your “tan jia” skills will now include mastering the use of digital technology in your training programmes. Do not fear, even if you view yourselves as tech newbies. Use the digital medium to deliver bite-sized modular lessons that meet the needs of time-strapped adult learners. There is also much to gain from increasingly powerful and accessible AI tools, like Chat GPT. They can form part of your toolkit to sharpen your delivery.
9. In addition, job counselling and career facilitation will become an increasingly core skill requirement for the adult educator. Your learners will need more support for career transitions. The training and guidance can help them stay versatile, so that even as jobs become obsolete in a dynamic environment, workers do not.
10. Second, broaden your awareness of key trends in the workplace, that affect all sectors and industries. Those of you who read SkillsFuture Singapore’s annual skills report will know that we identify four broad buckets of such pan-economy skills:
  - a. Digital skills, to enable workers in all fields to be smart users of new technology;
  - b. Green skills, to enable companies in all sectors to respond to the increasingly urgent global carbon constraint and sustainability drive.
  - c. Care skills, to enable people to support one another in ageing gracefully in an ageing society and workplace
  - d. Critical core skills, to enable all of us to operate well in a fast-moving world: to adapt, organise ourselves, and collaborate to deal with emerging issues
11. Be familiar with these trends, so that whether your learners are from the F&B sector, or in HR, or working for the built environment, you can help prime them for new demands that will invariably creep into their workplace.
12. Third, and perhaps this is the most challenging to do, strive to anchor yourself in one or two industry domains or professional fields. Some of you might already have prior experience in a particular profession. Make use of that background in your work as an adult educator, and keep updated. Strengthen your network within that industry domain. Learn from your learners about emerging tasks and challenges.
13. These efforts will enable you to be well equipped to contextualise classroom knowledge to industry practice. It is also good for your own career versatility, and it is certainly not a bad thing, if you can switch between training and practicing, from time to time.

14. So, there is much more to continually learn even after your graduation – to deepen your core skills, broaden your awareness of pan-economic trends, and anchor yourself in particular fields or domains. It sounds daunting, but IAL and in a broader sense, SkillsFuture Singapore, are committed to supporting and serving you. Because we know that lifelong learning for Singaporeans will succeed, when you succeed as an adult educator.
15. This is why the Minister for Education have charged IAL to be the national centre of excellence for adult education, to support you. In this role, IAL will have to continually review its offerings and invest even more in your Continuous Professional Development. Besides formal training programmes, IAL runs learning journeys and special interest groups. There is an innovSeries programme to empower you to innovate in your training. I would encourage you to find out more about all of this.
16. Most importantly, support one another professionally. We cannot all be good at everything, and the next best thing to knowing something is to know someone who is an expert. Join the Adult Educators Network and Special Interest Groups. Seek mentorship from senior Adult Educators who can share their experiences and guide you on this transformative journey. In time to come, be a mentor yourself and contribute back to the profession.
17. In conclusion, it is unquestionably an exciting, and challenging time, to enter this field. If you remember nothing of what I said, just remind yourself, every time you use the toilet flush or talk to ChatGPT, that as society moves with technology, workers progress by upskilling, and you – the adult educators – are the catalyst and enabler of this progress. I thank you for taking on this mission.